



"The camp produced fifty good, dedicated JDL people who would prowl the streets of New York at night in search of Arab or Russian victims. That summer there were twelve to fifteen bombings. We had an underground bomb lab in a house in Borough Park crammed with explosives, Tommy guns, Uzis. . . . We knew a grand jury was investigating us and that federal indictments were coming down. Then one of our people was arrested in Israel for shooting a West Bank Arab and was convicted and went to prison. We were very bummed out by that."

As a federal grand jury weighed indictments against a number of JDL militants, about forty suspects, including Liebowitz, suddenly moved to Israel in the winter of 1983. According to a federal law enforcement agent involved in the JDL probe, that effectively stymied the investigation. Weary of police investigations, Liebowitz tried to keep away from Kahane and his followers in Israel. He moved to a military base in the Negev to work as a volunteer. "It is wonderful to be in my country," he wrote his mother. "There is some poetic justice in this scene of lighting the Chanukah candles in a military base in the Negev. It is a dramatic scene. The sun shines softly and religious soldiers light a large menorah and say prayers. I am home. I have never felt better in my whole life in any other place."

A few weeks after Liebowitz wrote to his mother, a bomb planted by the PLO in the back of a bus in Jerusalem exploded, killing several passengers, including two young Jewish girls. "I feel as if I had lost my own sister," he wrote in another letter home. "I can't stand this. . . . I am very upset. . . . Jews are dying here only because they want to live here. . . . I must see Rabbi Kahane."

But Liebowitz got mixed signals from Kahane. On one hand, he says, Kahane told him not to do anything illegal and risk going to jail. However, he said Kahane also constantly preached that vengeance is holy. "The bombing of the [Jewish] bus was like a sign," Liebowitz told me. "I knew what road I had to take. I swore I was going to avenge Jewish blood." He says he met four other Kach Party members from the United States who, like him, itched to strike back at the Arabs. Craig Leitner, whose father is a top official with the New York City Board of Education, was responsible for co-planning the attack. Liebowitz went to Kahane for money to finance the operation without telling

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him what they were planning. "I said, 'We need money fast,'" Liebowitz recalled. "Kahane took \$600 from his pocket and gave it to me without asking any questions."

Prior to the attack, Leitner wrote to Randy Medoff, the JDL boss in New York, instructing him that when he received a collect phone call from a "Mr. Gray," it would be a signal to phone the Israeli media with the news that a Jewish terrorist organization had machine-gunned an Arab bus. The Kach kids were arrested minutes after Leitner placed the call to Medoff. Liebowitz claims that he learned during police interrogation that Shin Bet had them under surveillance for twenty-four hours prior to the shooting.

Craig Leitner, who turned state's witness, not only documented the close links between terrorism, the Kach Party, and Rabbi Kahane, but also told Shin Bet a chilling tale of Ku Klux Klan-style violence. In a signed confession, he told Israeli officials:

One day, toward the end of July 1984, (we) agreed to take some action against the Arabs. About midnight we saw an Arab in his early twenties walking along the Hebron road. . . . I left the car and gave the Arab a blow with my fist and kicked him. . . . He escaped into the night. . . . We drove to Hebron and decided to set fire to Arab cars. We had two plastic bottles filled with gasoline. (We) took the fuel and poured it under a number of cars. We set them on fire, but we didn't wait to see what happened. There were many dogs around and I was afraid they might wake up the neighbors, or they might bite us and we would get rabies.

Several days later in Jerusalem, according to his confession, "We took some empty bottles and rags, then we went to the Kach office because I knew that Rabbi Kahane had left his car there and a fuel tank was in the back of the car. We made Molotov cocktails and drove to an Arab neighborhood. We threw two Molotovs at one of the Arab houses chosen at random."

Leitner then contacted an American friend from Kach who lived in the West Bank settlement Beit El. "I knew he spoke Hebrew [Leitner could not] and could be relied upon not to inform the police. I asked him to phone the news media and inform them that the attack in East Jerusalem was carried out by TNT [the name for the Kach terrorist underground in Israel]."

Kahane hired an attorney for his young machine gunners and occasionally visited them in prison. He appointed one of the youths imprisoned with Liebowitz, Yehuda Richter, from Beverly Hills, to be his chief deputy in Kach. Leitner, who somehow managed to flee from Israel, was later arrested by U.S. marshals at the White Plains, New York campus of Pace University Law School, where he was studying. He returned to Israel after lengthy legal maneuvering, served a year in prison, and is once again a law student at Touro College in Manhattan.

Liebowitz now says the machine-gun bus attack was a cathartic experience and that he is grateful that confinement in prison gave him the personal discipline he lacked. After spending more than two years in prison, he returned to the United States in 1986 to promote *aliya* (immigration to Israel) as an emissary of the Eretz Yisrael Movement, which is affiliated with Gush Emunim. He is currently working for a Manhattan-based security firm. He told me he helped install a security system for the Albanian Mission to the United Nations.

Matt says as soon as he saves enough money he will move to Israel permanently. His wife, Judy, a twenty-three-year-old nurse, would like to live in a quiet Jerusalem neighborhood and raise a family. Matt wants to move to the fiercely nationalist Palestinian West Bank city of Hebron, where ultranationalist Jews have carved a foothold in the heart of the city's squalid, fly-blown Casbah.

A young man who still values violence, Liebowitz says Kahane's radical philosophy continues to guide him. "I think the Arabs should be moved out of Israel," he said, echoing Kahane. "My parents can't believe that the bus attack had anything to do with ideology. They still think it happened because they got a divorce," he said, laughing softly.